

Taking Charge/Taking Command

For the new company (staff section or equivalent) commander, how you take charge will be of great interest to your subordinates as well as superiors. They will be interested in your leadership style. They will want to know your goals and standards and how you expect to achieve them. They'll want to know what changes you have in mind before you make them. They'll probably have as many questions about you as you do about them and the organization. In fact, you will be tested by some and expected to show improvements within the unit.

Incoming commanders normally know something about the unit they are taking charge of because they are often selected from within the command. The time between being selected to command and actually assuming command affords the incoming commander an excellent opportunity to begin the process of taking charge. Making good use of this time makes the transition easier.

Actions Prior to Taking Charge/Taking Command

Although each command and staff section is unique there are a number of common actions which can be accomplished prior to taking charge. As we discuss each of the possible actions, you should be able to identify those on which you will need to focus.

1. Determine the organization's mission.
 - What is the wartime mission of the unit?
Commit it to memory.
 - Are there contingency missions?
Look beyond the words for the full meaning and impact of the mission on the organization.
2. Determine what is expected of your unit. (What is expected on a day-to-day basis is often different from the wartime mission.)
 - What are the short and long term plans of your organization? Your higher headquarters?
 - What are the organization's:
 - Goals?
 - Priorities?
 - Plans?
 - Programs?
 - Budgets?
3. Determine who your immediate leader is and what he/she expects of you.
 - What are his professional expectations of you?
 - What are his personal expectations of you?
 - How does he/she use his staff (XO, S3)?
 - Is there an informal leadership chain?
 - How can I use the informal leadership chain?

4. Identify the key people outside your organization whose support you need to accomplish the mission.
 - What organizations, staff offices and individuals should I visit?
 - How do they contribute to accomplishing the mission or goals of the unit?
 - In what order should I visit them?
 - Is once enough or should there be a close liaison relationship?
5. Determine how the unit mission fits in with the mission of the next higher headquarters.
 - What is the mission of the higher headquarters?
 - What are its goals, plans, objectives?
 - How does my organization contribute to the mission of the higher headquarters?
 - What contingency missions do I contribute to and in what way?
6. Determine what standards your organization must meet.
 - What are the established standards for maintenance, operations, and training?
 - How are the standards measured?
 - Which standards are established by the battalion and which are established by the higher headquarters?
 - Are there any standards with "do or die" consequences?
 - Are there any standards in place which are not supported by documentation?
7. Determine what resources are available to help the organization accomplish the mission.
 - What is the personnel status of the unit?
 - Are there any critical equipment or personnel shortages?
 - What is your equipment status now and the average for the past quarter, the past 6 months?
 - Are there any major logistical problems?
 - What is your equipment status now and the average for the past quarter, the past 6 months?
 - Are there any major logistical problems?
 - How is the budget controlled and are there any budget problems?
 - What is the condition of the buildings and other facilities you use or are responsible for?
8. Determine who reports directly to you.
 - Is there anyone outside the formal organizational structure who reports to you? Why?
9. Study documents which pertain to your unit--unit history, lineage and honors, SOPs, policy memorandums, and authorization documents).
 - Have all of the leaders in the organization reviewed these documents?
 - Who is responsible for updating these documents?
 - Which of these are the most important?
10. Talk to the outgoing leader, if possible.
 - What are the major concerns, issues, problems, and frustrations of the outgoing commander?

- Are there any “skeletons in the closet” which might not be visible to the incoming commander?
 - What programs or policies did the outgoing commander initiate that he/she would like to see remain in effect?
 - If he/she were able to stay in command, what would he/she like to see change and why?
 - What is it that the unit does best?
 - What really seems to pull the organization together?
11. Listen for indications of the unit's reputation.
- What is the higher headquarters' perception of the unit?
 - What do the soldiers say?
 - What are the current reenlistment rates?
 - Has the unit won any recent awards or competitive events?
 - Are there any crime or drug related problems or indicators? (Don't overlook a visit to the provost marshal's office.)
12. If taking command, use the change of responsible officer inventory to begin assessing the unit.
- Although ensuring that all organizational property is accounted for is extremely important, don't overlook the opportunity you have to interact with the members of your new unit.
 - If possible, conduct the inventory by platoon or section. After you have inventoried the property, take a few moments and record your observations and impression of the platoon. This data will become valuable when you begin to establish yourself as the leader.
13. After you have completed the change of responsible officer inventory and prior to the actual assumption of duties, ask yourself the following questions:
- Are communications effective within the unit?
 - How do the subordinate leaders interact with soldiers?
 - Does the unit appear to have high standards?
 - Is there a sense of cooperation?
 - What are the long-range and short-range plans of the higher headquarters?

Many of your questions about the unit can be answered in part during the change of responsible officer inventory. If you are able to provide accurate answers for each of these questions, you have developed a basic understanding of the unit. You may not be able to answer all of the questions in detail. That will come in time. You will, however, have completed an initial assessment of the unit, your role and responsibilities, and will be prepared to continue the process of taking charge not as an outsider, but as the commander.

Actions to Establish Yourself as Leader of the Organization

Taking charge and establishing yourself as the leader is not something that can be imposed on an organization. It is a shared process; a process which involves the leader, his subordinates, and his superiors. Taking charge of a unit is often described as winning the trust, confidence, and respect of superiors and subordinates alike. Your assumption of command order will place you in charge on paper. However, it will not be until you demonstrate your mastery of the tactical, technical, administrative and leadership aspects of your job that you will truly establish yourself as the leader. The following discussion identifies 7 areas which should be addressed after assuming command or being assigned as a primary staff officer. The 7 areas are provided in an outline format which should make it easier for you to develop a take charge checklist for yourself.

1. Hold initial meetings with subordinate leaders. The tone for the initial meeting with your subordinate leaders, to a large extent, will be a result of the observations you made as you prepared to assume command. If your unit is in great shape and your predecessor has been an excellent leader, it may be worthwhile to continue past policies. Articulate your hope that you will be able to keep the unit's performance and morale at its high level. If, on the other hand, you are following a leader who was harsh, cold or impersonal, but the unit was performing well, you can take the opportunity to improve things by being approachable. By doing this you should be able to enhance both morale and performance. Finally, if you take over a unit that is performing badly you can take the approach that it is time for everyone in the organization to chart a new course, recognize past performance deficiencies and work together to upgrade performance across the entire organization.

- Identify yourself and your background.
- Thank your subordinates for their assistance during the change of responsible officer inventory.
- If you've developed a leadership philosophy share it with your subordinate leaders.
- Identify your short and long-term goals and priorities.
- Give them an example of the performance standards you expect.
- Identify and explain your concept and standard of integrity.
- Emphasize communications.
- Ask for questions and close on a positive note.

2. Visit each element of your organization.

- As soon as possible after the change of command visit each staff section and subordinate unit. Schedule the visit. Tell the platoon leader or section sergeant that you want the opportunity to visit the platoon or section area, and meet each soldier. Give them some time to prepare.
- Talk to each of your soldiers, get to know them and give them the opportunity to see you. Ask them to tell you about their job.
- Be professional and ask meaningful questions, such as, "When was your vehicle in maintenance last: What was wrong with it? How long was it in maintenance?" Rather than "How's your morale?" That type of question will normally result in a response such as, "Great!"

- Do your homework before the visit. If there are issues you're uncertain about, ask. If the platoon has performed well previously recognize their achievements and challenge them to continue at that high level.

3. Ensure you understand the functions you are responsible for such as training, maintenance and administration.

- When are you required to submit training schedules?
- Who requests training areas for small unit training?
- When are the company and battalion training meetings conducted? Who must be present?
- When are you required to provide input for the Unit Status Report?
- Who is responsible for priority requisitions?
- Who schedules quarterly, semiannual, and annual services?
- What are your administrative suspenses?
- Who is responsible for personnel actions?
- Which functions and responsibilities are "high threat?"

4. Complete your officer evaluation report support form.

- Don't just copy your predecessor's support form.
- Use the opportunity to clearly identify in quantifiable terms:
 - personal goals.
 - unit goals.
 - areas of consideration.
- Take your support form to your commander, allow him/her time to review it and discuss its content with you.
- Reach concurrence with your boss.
- Initiate periodic reviews as needed.

5. Determine the level of competence, the strengths and the weaknesses of your subordinates. There are four primary means of gathering data to determine the level of competence, strengths and the weaknesses of your subordinates.

a. Historical performance data can be obtained by reviewing MTP results, command inspection reports, equipment availability reports, readiness reports, skill development test reports, previous unit status reports and training briefing slides.

b. Surveys can also be used. Check with your command to determine if there are surveys which you should use.

c. Interviews, either individual or in small groups, is another way of determining strengths, weaknesses and competence. Interviews allow you to ask clarifying questions regarding the information you obtain.

d. Observation. Don't overlook the power of observation. Does the unit perform well as a team? Are missions accomplished correctly, the first time? Do soldiers demonstrate pride in their section, platoon, company?

6. Develop a plan to assess your organization.

- a. Focus your assessment efforts. Identify the areas you want to assess and why you want to assess the area.
 - b. Make a plan to assess each area separately.
 - c. Observe your unit's performance and record the results.
 - d. Compare the results with established standards.
 - e. Provide performance feedback and, if needed, establish a plan to improve performance.
6. As time allows, visit those key people outside your organization who support your unit.
- The command sergeant major.
 - The operations and training officer.
 - The chaplain.
 - The direct support unit shop officer.
 - The staff judge advocate.
 - The personnel service officer.

Summary

You can use the information provided above as the basis for developing your own personalized take-charge/command checklist. The better prepared you are to take command/charge, the better your chance for success. However, it is important to remember that you are not alone when you take command/charge. You and your First Sergeant are a company command team. Working together you create a positive and effective command climate. It has been said that you might be able to get away with having a weak executive officer, platoon leader or platoon sergeant, but you **MUST** have a good first sergeant. Developing a positive relationship with your first sergeant must be factored into your take command/charge plan.

***Company Team Building**
Five Steps to Success
Required Reading 2

By 1SG Grover L Watters

I've read many articles about the commander and first sergeant relationship which helped me form my own ideas of how that team should be established. However, it wasn't until I became a first sergeant that I realized how vital the union of these two leaders is in forming a strong company command team and setting the command climate. Teamwork is the element that makes or breaks the relationship. The 'how' of working together has kept many a good commander and first sergeant baffled. In some cases, attempts at working together failed because there wasn't mutual cooperation. There has to be a bond between these two leaders before they can form their team. That bond building can be done by working on five elements: relationship, responsibilities, loyalty, duty and goals.

RELATIONSHIP--The commander and first sergeant relationship has to be one of mutual understanding and respect. They must share experiences and ideas both good and bad. They must take each other into consideration and give honest responses. Openness leads to proper sharing between the team. Friendship is also important. Not "buddy buddy", but one of personal concern for each other and their family. My commander and I understand each other's hobbies and what's important in our lives outside the Army. This helps us to better understand where the other is coming from.

RESPONSIBILITIES--These are well defined in AR 600 20. The commander is responsible for everything and the first sergeant implements. Share tasks. Do it in any manner that is comfortable for both leaders. As first sergeant, I have taken the tasks of monitoring weight control, the PT program, awards and NCOERs and building and lawn maintenance. The commander's main focus is on training. These may seem like the traditional roles but the most important point is that we divide the responsibility and share the load.

LOYALTY--This is the element that bonds the team. Loyalty to and from each other must run deep. There is unquestionable loyalty between my commander and me. We understand and support each other. We openly discuss any problems we have and back each other up.

DUTY -- This is professionalism at its best. I refer to GEN MacArthur's speech "Duty, Honor, Country." Both the commander and first sergeant must be truly professional and set high standards. It's not uncommon for our command team to come to work early and stay late. One element that eases tensions early on is to know you can call on each other at any time and receive full support until the mission is complete.

GOALS--Short term goals must be established early along with the long term goals. These goals could last until the next change of command. But setting these goals does pay off. My commander set a long term goal of a successful first gunnery for the company. The short term goals were to lock in crews early to ensure each has high UCOFT scores, have a good home

station gunnery and walk away from SIMNET with each crew confident they could hit targets and maneuver as a platoon on the ground. Well, we started out great, but ended up on Table VIII flat on our faces. Picking up the pieces and knowing the company was trained, we rebuilt. We rebuilt confidence that Table XII would be ours. In the end it was. Two platoons qualified distinguished and one qualified superior. We reached our long term goal as a result of short term goal accomplishment. A command team forms if a commander and first sergeant work out the five elements discussed. That team has a sense of direction and duty built on mutual trust and will assist each other in accomplishing their mission.

In addition, it will be a soldier to soldier relationship that lasts throughout your military career as well as your personal lives. The team attitude will allow you both to lead your company and successfully take care of your soldiers and lead them where you want them to go.

* Source: NCO Journal/Winter 93

***Company Command:
A Strategy for the First Day.
Required Reading 3**

By MAJ Harry W. Christiansen

For captains graduating from the advanced course, the next major challenge is leading soldiers as a company commander. The responsibility of command can create immense anxiety, as well as great personal satisfaction. The first day of command sets the stage for future success. Preparation for this important day begins well before you take the guidon.

Values

By the time you graduate from the advanced course you have had some experience leading soldiers as a platoon or staff section leader. You have developed a leadership style and have some notion of how you like to do business. Before you take charge, make sure that you know yourself. Know what is important to you. Define your values; decide what your standards will be (your zone of acceptability), and formalize your command philosophy. After you take command, conduct a leadership transition meeting with your subordinate leaders. Values are your attitudes about what is important to you. Knowing what those are makes prioritizing and decision-making easier. Values also provide a framework or reference point for unit leaders in carrying out your intent. Knowing what is important to others allows you to more effectively get things done by dovetailing mission requirements with soldiers and leaders who can do the job.

The Army's four individual values and the professional Army ethic outlined in FM 22-100, Army Leadership, are a good starting point. Remember, your values must come from your heart. They must represent that for which you stand. Standards outline what you consider acceptable behavior or performance. Commanders set standards and decide policy. Some standards may be absolute, such as integrity, with no room for error. Most standards, however, will be within a zone or window of acceptability. For example, an oil level must be between the full and low marks on the dipstick—the zone of acceptability is between the F and L.

Standards already exist for most areas. Regulations, training manuals, mission training plans and SOPs contain them. Your job is to interpret and communicate these standards to your soldiers. Remember, a standard is only as good as the extent to which it is enforced.

A command philosophy communicates your expectations of others and what they can expect from you. It outlines your method of operation and reflects how you do business. It may include your values and some standards. A soldier should be able to easily comprehend the philosophy and, as a result, know the kind of leader you are. Although there is no required format, most philosophies are one-page memorandums. The command philosophy is most helpful when issued the first day in command. Remember, once your philosophy is published, you must walk your talk. Soldiers will watch to see if your behavior matches your deeds.

So far, these are steps to take before the first day of command. The outgoing commander is responsible for the change-of-command ceremony. Work with him/her to have the ceremony

midmorning. Then, meet with your top leadership in the afternoon and give your soldiers the afternoon off. The leadership transition meeting rapidly gets you on board with the unit. Conduct it in two parts for about four hours.

Spend the first part of the meeting gathering information by listening and asking many questions. In the beginning of the meeting you are in the "receive" mode. Focus on what the unit does well, what needs fixing, and near-term events requiring your involvement. Let your subordinate leaders give you their assessment of these topics. Resist making on-the-spot decisions. If an issue demands your immediate attention, discuss it later with your first sergeant or executive officer.

The second part of the meeting you do the talking. If you listen to the topics discussed in the first part of the meeting, you should sense the type of information your subordinate leaders need from you. Begin your comments by answering these needs. Next, provide them copies of your command philosophy and discuss its contents. Finally thank your team for bringing you up to date on unit activities and commit to providing them feedback on the issues they surfaced.

Begin Planning Now

Company command is an exciting and demanding period in your career. Setting yourself up for success requires planning and preparation before you take the guidon. Know your values, set your standards, and communicate your command philosophy at the leadership transition meeting. These actions will put you in the driver's seat of a fast-moving train on your first day of command.

* Source: ARMY TRAINER/Summer 93

***Philosophy of Command for the
Company/Troop Commander**
Required Reading 4

by Captain Harold L. Meyer Jr. and Captain Kenneth C. Blakely

"XO, I need to see you, the first sergeant, and all the platoon leaders and platoon sergeants in my office after the reception."

"Roger, Sir," your XO replies as he turns to gather the leaders of your new company.

You've just taken command of your first company. After making a few choice comments to the troops, you have released them for the day. You now have all the company's leaders to yourself. As you walk into your new office after the reception, you see that they have arrayed themselves against the wall. They may not even realize it themselves, but they are looking for a direction from you. What will you tell them? How will you allay their fears and anticipation? In the scant few minutes that you have, what will you give them to let them know who you are and what they can expect from you?

Hopefully, you have already done some serious thinking, and you already know what to tell them. What they are looking for, and what you should be able to tell them from square one, is your philosophy of command. They may not call it by that name, but what they're looking for is an encapsulation of what is important to you—what makes you tick. They want to know how you think, what are your triggers, and how you will command this company. They don't want to know your policies—that will come later. Right now, what they need is a quick rundown on you.

Philosophy of command has become somewhat of a buzzword of late. Students at Armor OAC must write one, and most new commanders publish one in the first few days of their command. In fact, a philosophy of command has become a de facto requirement in many units, alongside policy letters and safety briefings. Unfortunately, no one has quantified it yet, and there is considerable confusion about what it really is. Some officers consider it nothing more than a big policy letter, and they end up writing ten or twenty- page philosophies of command which few people read and fewer understand. Like the commander's intent, which was inserted into the five paragraph field order and then debated by service schools and doctrinal instructors, the philosophy of command has been made a requirement with no accompanying guidance on what it is and how to write it.

The bottom line is that we need a format. We need one, not simply because the Army has a format for everything else, but to provide the new commander a starting point for this important document. The sample philosophy of command presented here is a viable format that can serve as a basis for building a personalized philosophy of command. While it is certainly not meant to be the be-all and end-all of the philosophy of command, because everyone's final product will be different, it is a place to start.

Depending on which alternate definition one chooses, the word "philosophy" means "a theory of the principles underlying conduct" or "the general principles or laws of an activity." Both definitions are applicable, for they both describe different aspects of a good philosophy of command. By definition, different commanders will have different philosophies of command, because everyone's "principles underlying conduct" are different. Simply put, a good philosophy of command should spell out the general principles and ground rules under which you will command. A philosophy of command is **NOT** a policy, and it is not communicated in a policy letter. Policies are more specific and narrower in scope. A policy spells out how the unit will conduct itself in a certain situation. The philosophy of command is a quantification of how the commander thinks and what is important to him/her, and it constitutes a foundation on which to build a successful company.

The philosophy of command should have four distinct parts, arranged in a standard memo format. The first part is the purpose. This area should be short and to the point—one or two sentences at the most. The most important thing is that the purpose tell the reader that what they are about to read is the set of ground rules that his new commander will work under.

The second section is an introduction. In this part, the author should introduce himself as the new commander of the unit. This is the best place to put some remarks about teamwork, the reputation of the unit, and other tone-setting comments that are aimed at the entire unit. Most important, however, the introduction lets every one know who you are. It attempts to establish a rapport that you build on in the next two sections.

The third section is the body, and constitutes the real meat of the philosophy of command. In this section, the new commander spells out those things which are important to him/her and establishes ground rules for the unit. Obviously, there is no school solution, and this section will reflect the personality of the commander. In the course of creating this section, the new commander should ask himself some hard questions. What is important to me? How do I handle authority and subordination? What are some things I simply won't tolerate, and some things I want to encourage? And how will power and authority flow in my unit? These should be some of the issues that are covered in a good philosophy of command. In short, try to identify the issues that define how you will operate as a commander, and describe them for your new subordinates as succinctly as possible.

The last section should be the conclusion. No more than a paragraph long, it should recap many of the things you said in your introduction. In particular, the new commander might want to address things like teamwork, some of the challenges ahead or your pleasure at being assigned to the unit. In building the philosophy of command, a new commander should remember a few overall concerns. First, keep it short. A good philosophy of command should be no more than two or three pages long. Keeping it short and easily digestible ensures that it will be read by more members of the unit. It is tempting to expound on many subjects and try to pass on all the wisdom you've collected, but an eight or nine-page philosophy of command simply will not be read. Second, ensure that you are able to publish your philosophy of command by the end of the first week of command—preferably the very first day. The soldiers in your unit want to know about you, and keeping them waiting will only add to their stress. Finally, remember that the

philosophy of command is not a policy letter. We've made this distinction a few times because we see this as the biggest pitfall for officers trying to put together their first philosophy of command. Too often, officers treat the philosophy of command as an opportunity to spell out specifically how the unit will operate, and cover such subjects as maintenance, sexual harassment, training, reenlistment, or education. These issues are in the realm of a unit policy, and should be covered in the set of policy letters that the commander publishes soon after taking command. A proper philosophy of command is intentionally vague on specific areas of unit operation, and only addresses those issues that define how the commander will operate.

The example philosophy of command that is below is certainly not the industry standard. As a matter of fact, the whole purpose of this article was to recognize that there is no industry standard, and to present one option toward establishing one. We believe that if these principles are followed, new commanders will be able to define the things that are important to them early on, allay the apprehensions of their subordinates, and build a basis for more successful commands. It's only a suggestion, but it's a good place to start.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
ALPHA COMPANY. 4TH BATTALION, 68TH ARMOR
FORT CARSON. COLORADO 80913

1 January 19xx

MEMORANDUM FOR ALL PERSONNEL IN ALPHA COMPANY, 4-68 ARMOR

SUBJECT: Philosophy of Command

1. PURPOSE. To describe the Philosophy of Command under which I will operate.

2. As I took command of this great unit today. I felt both proud to be given the opportunity to command and lucky to serve with all of you. As your new commander, there will be many things for me to learn and see in the coming months. By the same token, you will want to learn about me and how I operate. In this Philosophy of Command, I will lay out some of the things that are important to me, and will define how I will conduct business during my Command. I believe it is critical that we all get started on the same sheet of music, and this is the best way to go about it. In the coming months, we will face many challenges together. Your reputation is the best, and I have no doubt that by working together, we can successfully accomplish anything.

3. I have divided the areas that I want to cover into two categories: Duty and Discipline. I will cover a few subjects in each, and each subject is equally important to me.

a. Duty. (Work Performance). Robert E. Lee said "Duty is the most sublime word. A man can do no more. He should never hope to do less." That quote establishes a lofty goal, but it is one that we as soldiers should strive for. Here are some things along this subject that I think are important:

1. Support the chain of command—up and down I expect every member of the company to utilize and respect the chain of command.

2. Do the best you can all the time. No matter what the mission is, always strive to complete it correctly the first time.

3. Give a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. I expect every soldier to work at the level of their duty position and rank.

b. Discipline. George Washington said that "Discipline is the soul of an Army," and I believe it. There are many facets to discipline, though, and I cover some of the most important below.

(1) Never be insubordinate. No matter what the situation, respect the rank and the duty position of the leader. If a problem develops, use the chain of command.

(2) Don't abuse drugs or alcohol. I will not tolerate any use of any kind of illegal nonprescribed drugs. Violators will be prosecuted to the full extent of the UCMJ. There will be no alcohol abuse tolerated.

(3) Do not lie, cheat or steal. These acts will not be tolerated and will be dealt with severely.

(4) Conduct yourself professionally. Every soldier's conduct should be exemplary. Sexual harassment of any kind will not be tolerated. Do not commit adultery.

4. Family. Soldiers' families are part of the Army family. A happy family leads to a productive soldier. This unit will foster active family participation in unit functions and events.

5. Leaders. Leaders lead from the front and in the front is where all leaders will be. All soldiers expect, and should receive, a knowledgeable, responsible, caring leader.

6. P.O.B. No matter what comes down, no matter what happens, no matter who was responsible, I'm the Point of Blame.

7. What I have laid out here is not meant to be the Riot Act. It is simply that set of issues and beliefs that will define how I will conduct business. If anyone has questions or comments about my Philosophy of Command, I would like to hear them. My door is always open.

Again, let me say how pleased I am to be here. It is both a privilege and an honor to serve with all of you and be a part of our unit's history. We are going to accomplish great things—not because of me, but because of us!

Evin M. Strait
Captain, Armor
Commanding

* Source ARMOR Magazine/Mar/Apr 93

***The Company Command Team**
Required Reading 5

By LIEUTENANT COLONEL COLE C. KINGSEED

As a new company commander, like many others before you, you will soon discover that the unit first sergeant is indispensable to you in your efforts to build a combat ready force. Not only will he be the primary conduit through which you will spell out your policies, he will also be the one who enforces standards of discipline and conduct throughout the command.

With the ceremonial assumption of command, symbolized by the acceptance of the guidon, the first sergeant transfers his loyalty from your predecessor to you. You are now his commander, and one of his primary responsibilities as a professional soldier will be to see that you have a successful command.

But you can also expect him/her to have a vested interest in preserving the status quo—until you direct otherwise. After all, since he helped build the company into the unit the former commander wanted, you can logically assume that he was not totally opposed to that commander's policies. It is therefore essential that the two of you establish a clear channel of communication at the earliest opportunity.

First, to set the tone of the new command relationship in your company, you will probably find it a good idea to talk to the first sergeant immediately after assuming command. This talk must cover at least two general topics—your command philosophy and your concept of the first sergeant's role. Until the two of you have an understanding on both, you will wander aimlessly and accomplish little.

A command philosophy is just as important at company level as it is at battalion. Unfortunately, though, while the Army does a good job of teaching battalion command designees the importance of developing a command philosophy, it offers no such training for company command designees.

You will make the first sergeant's job a lot easier if you take the time to outline your vision of where you want the company to be six months, a year, and 18 months from now. Normally, he will want to support you, and if he understands what you want, he will be able to deliver from the beginning. Do not let this conversation be one-sided. Two-way communication always leads to better results. In most cases, the first sergeant is a veteran of nearly 15 years of service and knows the company fairly well. He can describe the command's current strengths and weaknesses. You might ask him/her, for example, what five things he would do differently to improve the company's readiness, and what he knows about the company that he feels you should know immediately. Once you have this information, you will have established a common foundation on which both of you as a team can lead the company toward the fulfillment of your vision.

Equally important, the first sergeant must understand what you expect his role to be. As a professional soldier, he will make any adjustments you want, but you have an obligation to tell him/her precisely how you want him/her to conduct business. Don't wait until he has to ask.

When I became a battalion commander, for example, I spoke to the first sergeants immediately after meeting the command sergeant major, gave them my written guidance, and outlined my expectations. A company commander can do this just as easily at his level, and this written guidance then becomes an integral part of his future performance counseling of the first sergeant. It should outline both general and specific duties, responsibilities, and authority.

The first sergeant's general duties are easy to identify. As the senior noncommissioned officer, he sets a leadership example and serves as an inspiration to the company, including the officers, NCOs, and soldiers. He also sets the example and enforces standards of conduct, military courtesy, and uniform policies. He participates in physical training and ensures that every aspect of it is either performed correctly or corrected on the spot. Even though the first sergeant probably already knows what these duties are, he will still appreciate **hearing them from you**.

A first sergeant's specific duties vary with his commander. In my initial discussion with the battalion's first sergeants, I outlined several areas that I wanted emphasized. Each of these areas had several subcategories that I also outlined in writing. These same areas may be useful to you:

Reception and Integration. The first sergeant can establish a program for accepting new soldiers into the command with the intent of making every incoming soldier and his family feel that they play an important role in the company from the start. The assignment of sponsors, the resolution of immediate problems, and assistance in finding places to live (if applicable) all fall within this category.

Company Training. In planning and conducting company training, the first sergeant will be your principal advisor on any training deficiencies and will organize remedial training. He should be the most knowledgeable NCO in the company on tactical operations and the expert in incorporating individual tasks to support the collective training outlined in the company mission essential task list.

Hold him/her responsible for supervising common task tests (CTTs), and make him/her the primary instructor for NCO professional development (NCOPD). Leader development must be a command priority. Have him/her develop a *program*, not just a series of classes. Tie NCOPD to upcoming company missions, and use him/her extensively in developing the unit training plan. A strong command team can make training interesting as well as challenging.

Accountability and Responsibility. This area of emphasis may be a bit more controversial and may vary, depending on your perspective. As the commander, you are ultimately responsible for property accountability, but you may want to hold the first sergeant personally responsible for the operation of the company supply room. Since the efficient operation of the supply room is directly linked to soldier morale, it is reasonable for the first sergeant to be involved in it. At least, direct him/her to conduct periodic inspections of the supply room and CTA 50 equipment.

In addition, he should set the example for the soldiers by maintaining property accountability in the orderly room.

Counseling. Since counseling is the key to junior leadership development, the first sergeant must train the platoon sergeants to use proper counseling techniques. He should inspect the unit counseling files periodically to ensure that the written forms are legible, that they are signed by the counselor and the soldier, and that they are being prepared on time. He should also make sure the counseling is based on good hard facts instead of being too general to be of any use.

Company Administration. The first sergeant's duties in this area include accurate status reporting, advising you on assigning new NCOs and soldiers, monitoring enlisted evaluation reports, awards, nonjudicial punishment, and many other tasks. You might mention any specific areas you want him/her to concentrate on. Meticulously outlining the aspects of company administration will be as useful to you as to him/her.

Barracks Maintenance and Inspections. You should hold the first sergeant personally responsible for supervising barracks maintenance and conducting inspections. Does the company have a good repair and utility program? Are work orders submitted in a timely manner? What are the results? Are the soldiers inspected daily? (Just as things get done that a commander checks, so do things the first sergeant checks.) Make sure he also teaches the platoon sergeants and squad leaders how to inspect.

Company Headquarters. The first sergeant is also the principal supervisor of the company headquarters. Although some commanders delegate this responsibility to the executive officer, I believe the first sergeant is better suited to the task. I suggest you hold him/her responsible for the supply room, the NBC room, the communications room, and the arms room.

In the Field. In a tactical environment, he can certainly help in supply functions and mess operations, but his true value lies elsewhere. Take advantage of all the experience he has had in his years of service, and have him/her assist and advise you on the tactical employment of the company. He can ensure that the weapons are cleaned daily in the field and that the equipment is serviceable. You should also hold him/her personally responsible for the appearance of uniforms in the field.

In the process of discussing his duties and responsibilities, you may also want to discuss what you think his relationship with the command sergeant major should be. Just as the first sergeant should train the platoon sergeants to take over his job, the battalion **command sergeant major** should teach the first sergeants the responsibilities of his job. Consequently, you should foster a good working relationship between your first sergeant and the command sergeant major; you should certainly not try to hinder it.

Finally, in that initial conversation, you may want to ask him/her what he expects from you as his commander. Although he will probably not say much at this time, if you extend him/her the professional courtesy of asking, he will feel free to offer friendly recommendations and

suggestions as time passes. Right now, he probably just wants to make sure he understands your expectations; as a professional soldier, he will take it from there.

In summary, the first sergeant will make or break the soldiers in your command. Everything from morals to morale, from ethical conduct to tactical proficiency, is squarely on his shoulders. He wants to make you successful because the company is not just your unit; it is also his. More important, it is the soldiers' unit and many of them will be there long after you have relinquished command.

By clearly enunciating your command philosophy and outlining the duties you expect the first sergeant to perform, you will be well on your way to developing a strong command team and a unit that is proficient in its combat skills and can wage war successfully if the need arises.

* Source INFANTRY Magazine/Oct 90

APPENDIX C

Guidance for Seminar

Suggestions for the Seminar

Learning Activity 3 for this TSP is designed as a seminar. Former (or current) company commanders or first sergeants are asked to participate in a seminar designed around being a company commander of first sergeant. The following questions (topics) are suggestions which you may use to structure the seminar. The selected questions (topics) should be provided to the seminar leaders and discussed prior to the actual conduct of the lesson.

DO NOT LET THE SEMINAR TURN INTO A “WAR STORY” EVENT. FOCUS THE SEMINAR ON IMPORTANT COMPANY LEVEL LEADERSHIP ISSUES, ISSUES COVERED IN THE READINGS, AND ISSUES THAT YOU IDENTIFY FROM YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.

Below are some suggested topics and questions for the seminar. You, the instructor, should select issues which are relevant and important to your students. You should also add issues which are important to your students and which should be covered during your seminar.

1. This course, Take Charge of a Company, Staff Section or Similar Sized Organization, divides the take charge process into two components: prior to reporting and taking charge.
 - a. Based on your experience, what was the most important action(s) you took?
 - (1) prior to reporting?
 - (2) upon arrival at the organization and to establish yourself in your company leadership position?
 - b. What were some things you would do differently:
 - (1) prior to reporting?
 - (2) upon arrival at the organization and to establish yourself in your company leadership position?
2. 1SG Grover Watters indicates that the command team must bond and that the bonding can be built based on five elements: relationship, responsibilities, loyalty, duty and goals. Discuss what the commander/first sergeant can do in each of these areas to help develop the command team relationship.
3. Should the commander develop an official command philosophy? Why or why not? What experience did you have in this arena? If you were a commander, did you develop one? What was the impact of the philosophy on the organization? If you were a first sergeant, what experience did you have--did your commander develop one? What was the quality? What effect did it have? How do the policy letter and the command philosophy differ? What should be included in the commander's philosophy?
4. Command Team:
 - a. Officers: How did you work with your first sergeant to establish a command team? What worked and what would you do differently if you could do it again? How did you involve the first sergeant? How did you decide what responsibilities to give your first sergeant? What recommendations would you have to the new commander who is establishing a command team? What lessons did you learn? What is the key to establishing a working relationship for the command team?
 - b. First Sergeant: How did your commander include you in establishing a command team? What was successful and what was not? What type of responsibilities/duties were assigned to you? What worked well in your situation and what types of problems arose from the command team environment? What recommendations do you have to new first sergeants? What lessons did you learn? What is the key to working with the commander to establish a positive, effective command team environment?
5. Discipline:
 - a. Officer Courses: Maintaining discipline is an important responsibility for a new leader. What type of leadership challenges did you face in the discipline arena and how did you handle them? How would you recommend that the new leader establish and maintain discipline? Did you face issues such as alcoholism, abuse, AWOL, poor job performance, sexual discrimination, harassment, etc.? How did you handle these situations? What would you do differently and what would you recommend to the new commander?

b. First Sergeant Course. What responsibilities were you given in the discipline arena? What type of leadership challenges did you face and how did you handle them? What recommendations would you make to a new commander about establishing a discipline policy? What recommendations in this arena do you have for the new first sergeant?

6. What was the most satisfying part of your experience as a commander (first sergeant)? Why?

7. What was the most difficult part of being a commander (first sergeant)? Why? What would you recommend to a new commander (first sergeant)?

8. If you could give one piece of advice to a new commander (first sergeant)? What would it be?

9. What morale issues did you face and how did you handle them? What can you suggest to the new commander (first sergeant) to help him/her develop and maintain a positive climate in the organization?